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For more information, contact:

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### PSC Extends Deadline For Universal Access PROGRAM Applications

The state Public Service Commission has extended the deadline to April 1, 1999, for Montana schools, libraries, health care providers and communities to apply for assistance from the state Universal Access Program that helps to fund access to advanced telecommunications services. The former deadline was January 1.

In addition, applications for federally-funded discounts for telecommunications services are again being taken by the Schools & Libraries Corporation, which administers the nationwide E-rate program for schools and libraries. Applications for the 1999-2000 funding year will be accepted until mid-January. Most Montana schools and libraries qualify for substantial discounts. To date, 39 Montana schools and libraries have been awarded more than \$600,000 in federal E-rate discounts for the current funding year.

The Montana Universal Access Program, funded by a surcharge on intrastate telecommunications services, provides Internet access funding assistance to schools, libraries, health care providers, tribal colleges, and community public access points. The priority of the program is to ensure access to advanced telecommunications is available in each Montana community.

Qualified applicants will receive a 50-percent discount off of the telecommunications provider's lowest business rate for the transport cost of a high-speed, dedicated phone line. Discounts provided under the state program will be reduced by the amount of any federal discounts received by the applicant.

The PSC will notify successful applicants of their approved discount amounts by May 15 and discount funds will be disbursed no later than June 30. Applications for the Montana program are available from the PSC by calling Bonnie Lorang at 406-444-6191, or by writing to her at PO Box 202601, Helena MT 59620-2601. Applications may also be obtained electronically from the PSC's Internet web site at [www.psc.state.mt.us](http://www.psc.state.mt.us).

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